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# The View From RFK's Window

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A visitor to Sen. Robert F. Kennedy's new 14th-story apartment in United Nations Plaza, a few blocks from the world parliament, found him soon engaged in earnest debate with himself early last night.

He was deciding whether to deliver a major protest, amplifying some parenthetically pointed remarks he recited to a casual interviewer last week, against what he regards as the essentially futile and potentially explosive escalation in our bombing of North Viet Nam.

A newspaper report that we had struck close to Hanoi was unfolded on a table. Much of the ensuing conversation involved the implications of that report.

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The occasion possessed special solemnity because it was just five years ago this week that the late President Kennedy endured the agony of the Bay of Pigs. Somewhat reluctantly, I recalled the anniversary. I doubt that Sen. Kennedy required the reminder.

Indeed, it quickly seemed apparent that the recollection of that horror-story was in important measure responsible for his deep anxiety about the present—and about the sources and nature of the advice President Johnson is receiving from the military, diplomatic and intelligence establishments.

In his role as Attorney General, Robert Kennedy was not involved in the key summit conferences preceding the Bay of Pigs invasion. But he was given a last-minute briefing by some of the skilled intelligence agents on whom his late brother had relied.

"It lasted about 35 minutes and they seemed very convincing," he recalled in wry tones suggesting that such men would never similarly delude him again. They had told him that, at worst, the valiant invaders could disappear into the hills and live to fight another day. They told him nothing of the false hopes CIA had created among the Cuban exiles—or of many other uncalculated risks.

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No event scarred more deeply the Kennedy Administration. But it also gave both John and Robert Kennedy a profound skepticism about many counsellors. (The late President was to lament afterward that he had wasted his young brother's talents at the Justice Dept. when he should have been running the CIA.)

What plainly torments Robert Kennedy now is whether that history lesson has been absorbed. While his reservations about Secretary Rusk are undisguised, he retains high regard for Defense Secretary McNamara, and he is unwilling to engage in any public scapegoat-hunt. He is obsessed with the question of whether the President, whose loneliness of decision he understands, has become the prisoner of events, and failed to read the meaning of the past.

"I suppose he is being told that the bombings of the North will change everything, but I just don't see any evidence for that," he says. "It's a matter of going from one desperate measure to another that has no political bearing on the war in the South."

Then one asks him why he has hesitated to deliver a full-scale speech on the subject. He offers a troubled glance and walks over to the window with its dramatic view of the East River and remains silent for a moment.

"I don't know," he says, "I may. I would if I knew it would do some good."

He has no regrets over his call for more direct overtures to the Viet Cong. Events have plainly vindicated his plea for flexibility and the ultimate public response—in so far as it can be truly weighed—has been favorable.

But there remains perhaps the excessive inhibition of seeming to exploit the President's problems. This remains the continuing irony of Kennedy's predicament. It is his peculiar, intimate knowledge of the Presidential ordeal that often mutes or modifies his voice when his instinct is to cry out. Even his most restrained dissents are hastily construed as mischievous trouble-making, and his silences as opportunist evasions. But he does not want to raise hell for its own sake.

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Now he stands at the window, as night falls, and gazes at the river. He is both a shirt-sleeved youth, and a young man, wiser than his years. His face has begun to exhibit in small detail the passage of time, the impact of sorrow and conflict, and a resentment at the seeming condition of Hamlet-like irresolution.

"I want to think about this some more," he says finally.

He does not ask that his concern be kept a secret.

"I think we may keep doing one more military thing after another and it won't solve any political problems because in the end we'll probably have to make peace through a neutralist government unless something blows us all up," he says.

He adds a few words of documented distrust about military-CIA-State Dept. counsel, recalling again the debacle of five years ago that was the product of so many such minds.

But still he is asking himself aloud whether he should make another, larger production of his doubts—whether it is too late to speak anew, or whether this may be a final chance. He is not a happy fellow playing games.